

Wayward Women: Sexuality and Agency in a New Guinea Society, by Holly Wardlow. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. ISBN cloth, 978-0-520-24559-4; paper, 978-0-520-24560-0; xi + 284 pages, maps, photos, tables, notes, references, index. Cloth, US\$55.00; paper, US\$23.95.

Wayward Women is everything we've come to expect from Bruce Knauft and his former graduate students. Holly Wardlow has written a richly theorized and detailed ethnography on Papua New Guinea's "passenger women." Her account of Huli women who accept money for sex is moving and compelling reading. When a Huli wife is angry with her absent husband for failing to adequately support her or refusing to come home and avenge her rape (148–150), we excuse her decision to sell "her" body for sex at the same time as we worry over likely consequences such as sexually transmitted diseases and violence against her. Engaging in twenty-six difficult months of fieldwork in Tari and several rural areas in Southern Highlands Province, Wardlow observed numerous female victims of change in a particular postcolonial context fighting back with their most valuable "possessions"—their sexuality and reproductive capacity. Estranged from her father after he killed her mother, a young unmarried "passenger woman" decided to "ruin herself" so her father would never profit from receiving bridewealth for her (150). With Huli society's increasing reliance on cash and many women treated like market goods when their kin seek huge bridewealth payments

for them, the traditional bridewealth system and the meaning of women in it have changed in ways that cause some women "to repudiate the system altogether and withdraw their sexual resources from sociality by exchanging sex for money" (150). By thwarting the system, Wardlow argues, Huli passenger women are enacting a form of negative agency against their male kin, disrupting social reproduction, and raising the possibility of "a world in which women are no longer exchanged, valuables are no longer distributed, affines are no longer created, and the identities of children become indefinite" (151).

Throughout, Wardlow deftly blends her ethnographic account with theoretical questions, raising and then answering them, and never simplifying the issues regarding passenger women's main motivations. The three conceptual frameworks underpinning Wardlow's analysis are agency, sexuality, and incipient individualism. Drawing on practice theory, Wardlow asks why do passenger women do what they do? What configuration of cultural norms, social relations, and historical processes move them to accept money for sex? Focusing on asymmetrical relations of power, Wardlow describes how Huli women's desires, goals, and imagined possibilities are normally encompassed within the bridewealth system, and how women's lives are part of other people's (mostly men's) projects. In the Huli gender system, "women" are for transactions beyond themselves (13); their agency is encompassed, and their actions produce effects—"but effects whose ends are beyond the individual's actions and for a wider

purpose" (13). In such a context the only agency possible is negative: the refusal to be encompassed, literally self-destruction (14), or, in the case of passenger women, wayward sexuality or refusal to participate in bridewealth transactions and "compulsory heterosexuality." Wardlow convincingly demonstrates how passenger women's practices both emerge from and are a response to structural contradictions in the context of the commoditization of Huli society and marriage. As Western ideals of private property, Christianity, commodity consumption, and wage labor promote an incipient individualism and a bridewealth system that is no longer satisfying for and protective of women, Huli passenger women treat their own sexuality as an individual possession. While most passenger women attempt to keep one foot in the relational economy by paying children's school fees and helping other women in their gardens, many Huli women feel they are no longer important actors in the work of social reproduction (22). Husbands who work for wages see their paychecks as theirs to spend—some buying sex outside of marriage, a behavior that angers wives, depriving them as it does of a feeling of complete partnership with their husbands. While most women do not go as far as passenger women in expressing their individuality, there is a growing sense of "declining dividuality" (23) and the loss of relational identities.

Wardlow structures her ethnography in an interesting way. Beginning first in Tari town and only later addressing the several rural areas in which she worked, Wardlow mim-

ics her own fieldwork experience of working first in town. More importantly, she purposely reverses the usual way of presenting models of change in which villages are associated with tradition and town is the center of change by presenting them as part of one playing field. Town is where much of the money is, but participants in the bridewealth system are everywhere and hungry for the money and the things it can buy. While women may take pride in their rural gardens and the number of pigs they raise, bridewealth negotiations between migrants and villagers pull their lives into a larger arena in which they are being judged and bought and sold according to values they do not control. Few women have access to large amounts of cash with which they might balance their relations with male kin.

Most interesting—and as unsettling as I believe Wardlow meant it to be—is her discussion of Huli courting houses near the end of the book. Traditionally, Huli courting houses enabled men to find additional wives. Men would sing competitively, vying for the attentions of women who were widowed, divorced, abandoned, or on the run from violent husbands. Young unmarried men and women were said not to frequent the courting houses because of their reputation as places where men and women might make sexual assignations with one another. Today, courting houses are more like houses of prostitution, with some women accepting money for sex while others hope they may make a viable marriage or long-term relationship with one of their sexual partners. Wardlow makes it clear

that Huli courting houses “encompass a wide range of relationships and desires” on the part of male and female participants (194), and that there is disagreement among her older informants as to what role sexuality played in the courting houses of the past. What interests me, most, however, is how institutionalized courting houses for older men and women belie some anthropologists’ view of “traditional” societies as societies made up of “dividuals,” totally encompassed in their relational roles to one another. In reality, there are always persons who for one reason or another (sickness and death, tribal war, demographic quirks, personality, and so forth) do not quite fit into the system and so may be conscious of their individuality, however fearsome that may be. Wardlow’s book gives us much to think about when we consider concepts such as “incipient individuality” and how it may (or may not) be one result of people’s engagement with modernity and all that entails. Wardlow’s passenger women are so alive and individual in circumstances and choices that it is difficult to see them simply as the passive victims of society their name implies. And that is what Wardlow intended by calling them “wayward women.” They are women who, “if only momentarily,” escape or resist social encompassment (24).

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Our Wealth Is Loving Each Other: Self and Society in Fiji, by Karen J Brison. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007. ISBN 978-0-7391-1488-9, xix + 150 pages, bibliography, index. US\$60.00.

Many scholars would agree that “tradition” and “modernity” are cultural categories through which people evaluate, and sometimes attempt to shape, unfolding social action. Tradition and modernity are invoked as oppositions, each constructed against the other, but in practice they are often not neatly separable. In this regard, one of the delights of Karen J Brison’s *Our Wealth Is Loving Each Other* is reading the personal accounts of indigenous Fijian women who use both of these categories strategically, and sometimes simultaneously, positioning themselves both as vanguards of the new and defenders of the old. Brison argues that tensions of traditional versus modern are often configured in Fiji as sociocentric versus individualistic orientations: that is, being traditional means working for the social order, whereas being modern means looking out for oneself. The women who tell their life stories in this engaging book have figured out how to be both traditional and modern through “casting communalism as an individual achievement” (10). They insist on their own autonomy, but frame their autonomy as something they exercise for others’ benefit.

The key ethnographic term in the book is *vanua*, a complex Fijian domain encompassing chiefs and their subjects, land, and traditional practices including ritual exchanges